

ZYGOTE

Zygote has finally managed to find a job that requires more cunning, imagination and penny-pinching than the one he currently enjoys – but is he cut out for a life at the palace?

EVERY LITTLE HELPS

The recommended retail price of Microsoft Office really is steep. It ranges from a hefty £120 for the Student & Teacher version all the way up to a staggering £459 for Office Professional. That's a great deal of money at the best of times, but it would seem to be an insane option when there are alternatives around that are free, such as the excellent OpenOffice.org software, which is Microsoft-compatible.

The main reason Microsoft dominates is, of course, because huge numbers of PCs are sold with MS Office already installed. The buyer is probably unaware they are paying for it, assumes it's mandatory or a free gift, and is then too indolent to find an alternative office suite. The same goes for the anti-virus software and spam filters that come bundled with new PCs. For example, the Mozilla Thunderbird email suite has a brilliant spam filter built in, all for free, but it is the likes of McAfee that are preinstalled by high street retailers. The main reason people don't dump Microsoft in favour of cheap or free software is because they don't trust another brand, or feel there is no backup service in the event of software problems.

Until now, that is. Tesco has thrown down the gauntlet and started shipping its own-brand office and security suites at less than £20 a pop. Tesco provides

everything the likes of Microsoft or McAfee deliver at a fraction of the cost. Zygote knows legions of people who would trust Tesco over Microsoft any day. For under £20, legions more will buy a legitimate Tesco package as opposed to using pirate Microsoft software. The next phase of the battle for hearts and minds has begun: it is more than a friendly joust, and we smell blood. Bring it on!

SITES FOR SORE EYES

The service offered by Orange (formerly Wanadoo, formerly Freeserve) is not fit for purpose, and its refusal to tackle the root cause of severe email problems is despicable. Hundreds of thousands of emails sent by Orange customers are being bounced back as undeliverable, because they are being blocked as spam, when they are legitimate communications.

This is immensely annoying for private subscribers, but it can be financially disastrous for anyone trying to run a business online. The problem stems from the fact that Orange allows free sign-ups without checking them and so lets in the spammers. The spammers then abuse Orange servers that are shared by honest and decent customers. Recipients who subscribe to various junk-mail washers such as SpamCop never receive the legitimate emails, because everything emanating

from the same server is tarred with the same brush.

The problem began over six months ago and complaints have flooded in to Orange. Zygote has monitored over two dozen complaints on behalf of Orange customers and hereby declares that Orange has ignored every single one of them. Such arrogance deserves only one course of action: Zygote hopes that Orange haemorrhages customers in droves.

Still, at least Orange is not as incompetent as Her Majesty's Government. It has blown £5 million of our taxes on publicising a shite website designed to spread awareness of local council 'e-government'. The site, www.direct.gov.uk, is stiff with HTML coding errors and doesn't have the most basic files for automated indexing and listing by search engines. The lines of code that contain key words, by which the Great British public search for information, do not even include the word 'council', although they do boast the words 'Albion' and 'Blighty'. This indicates that the e-government campaign is run by twits who think squandering a £5 million budget is a jolly good wheeze. Needless to say, the result of their spend has been negligible. Zygote volunteers to escort those responsible to the Tower of London where they will be beheaded. Speaking of which...

HIS MASTER'S VICE

The Royal Household press office has advertised for a new webmaster to take over the British monarchy website. The job description demands the following qualities of the person they are looking for: "You will be of graduate calibre, with previous experience working on a high-profile website, able to develop imaginative and creative copy, and be able to work to strict budgetary constraints. Expertise in Photoshop is prerequisite."

Yes, you've guessed it, Zygote is the perfect candidate for the job. He is definitely of graduate calibre and finds Anne Bancroft's portrayal of Mrs Robinson sexually stimulating. He once helped Frank Zappa with a website problem and Zappa was undoubtedly high profile. Imaginative and creative under budgetary constraints? Zygote is happy to tell lies and is permanently broke. He also knows how to make ugly little aristocrats look half human in Photoshop. Zygote usually has Tuesday evenings free and he could probably fit in the royal work after *The Archers* and before *Newsnight*.

The only problem is they want their webmaster to be based in Buckingham Palace, which is a bit far for Zygote to travel on his own. But he would be prepared to work from a suitable regal venue nearer home. How about the Queen's Head down by dog-poo park? Apparently, they've got a half-decent WiFi hotspot and they serve eight per cent proof cider. A knighthood for the old boy in the New Year's Honours List would also be appreciated. Speaking of which, the warmest of season's greetings to you all. As we enter our 20th year of Zygote's celebrated column, heartfelt thanks for taking the time to read this and sincere best wishes for a sane and peaceful 2007. **ES**

Great Moments in Computing

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228: MACBITER

Way back when technology was in its infancy, there were all sorts of contentious issues

When Computer Shopper began, the merits of the PC versus the AppleMac became a central talking point

And what fun it's been!

Tony Tyler "Macbiter", 1943-2006

Cheers not Tears